

Managerial revelations

by Mary Hall

REVIEWERS of books about home-management and the kitchen usually say how useful they would be as a present for a new bride. But nowadays not many brides are really interested in the house and the running of it. They have a career which they hope to carry on, at least until they have children, and are probably moving into a rented two-roomed flat with a kitchen stacked with frozen foods. The time to give them a book about how to run a house will be when, for one reason or another, they have left their jobs and are sitting, defeated, among piles of dirty crockery, cobwebs, and filthy, noisy children. Whether, at this stage, a book will help them or send them mad will depend upon their character, but I think that some of these should at least give them a few hours good reading and a theoretical idea of what they should be doing.

A really comprehensive book, which explains how to cope with almost anything, from rumbling water pipes to stains on fur coats, is the "Domestic Encyclopedia" by Dorothy V. Davis (Faber and Faber, 25s.). I spent some time thinking of problems which crop up around the house and looking them up in the encyclopaedia, and the solution was always there. There are chapters on cleaning, cookery, laundering, decorating, and a most useful one on fabrics and fibres which explains how to treat and care for almost every material there is. This is one book which probably would be welcomed by the newly wed since it also contains information on the care of clothes and the removal of stains of almost anything from axle grease to alcohol.

The introduction to "The Kitchen" by Joan E. Walley (Constable, 30s.) says that although there are many books on food and its preparation, very few have been written about the kitchen itself. The author is the head of the household science department at Queen Elizabeth College, London, and her book is a serious and scientific study of every aspect of what constitutes a good kitchen. It will obviously be a valuable book for teachers and students of domestic science, and for the people who plan kitchens—manufacturers and archi-

lects. Although the non-scientific housewife may find some of the chapters a bit daunting—for instance the one on the fundamentals of heat transference—there is much which is of value for them too. There is information about the different materials used in the kitchen and their uses, and about what points to notice when buying pots and pans. Illustrations include photographs of some of the equipment mentioned in the text, and a horrifying one showing the pitting and thinning of an aluminium pan used for years for boiling greens with bicarbonate of soda in the cooking water.

Children nowadays have on the whole a much better chance of learning how a home should be run than their mothers did. Domestic science courses in schools, with, in some cases, a school flat for the practical demonstration of what various skills are needed, are a much better way of learning than from a harassed and not-too-patient mother. Having recently seen a magnificent flat where the pupils of a new secondary modern school learn about home-management, I wonder whether when they eventually have homes of their own the children are going to be depressed by the differences they find, or encouraged by their memories to bring their houses up to standard. "Home Management" by Phyllis Davidson (Batsford, 25s.) had this sort of depressing effect on me. Chapters on the routine cleaning of the house, with emphasis on method; and on the right way of setting a table for breakfast, tea, and dinner, filled me with feelings of guilt. For students, schoolchildren, and all those not irrevocably fixed in inefficiency, however, this should be a useful book. It also deals with much that is in the "Domestic Encyclopedia" and "The Kitchen" and is a sort of halfway house between the two.

Anyone who has thought of having central heating installed in his house, or has decided to buy some new heating appliance, knows that it is no good just reading the advertisements. Figures can be manipulated in almost any way, and the sellers of different forms of heat can always make their own brand sound the most attractive and economical. Someone with a knowledge of all the different methods of

heating and an unbiased opinion into the bargain is pretty well impossible to find. "Domestic Heating" (Temple Press, 21s) solves this problem by bringing together in one book several people, each of them experts in different forms of heating, under the general editorship of W. F. B. Shaw of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. Each contributes an article on his own special subject, written with the ordinary person specifically in mind, but with much detail. Anyone foolish enough to alter the heating in his home without at least borrowing this book from the library will have only himself to blame.

All these super-efficient books having brought to the surface my safely buried feelings of incompetence it was a joy to turn to "The Countrywoman's Year" by the Marchioness of Anglesey* (Michael Joseph, 21s), a delightful hodge-podge of pieces about country customs, recipes, toy-making, and many other occupations in which members of the Women's Institute all over the country indulge. The book is divided into sections roughly defined by the seasons of the year, and each has its piece about the garden, the kitchen, local festivals and occupations.

It is the sort of book which fires one with enthusiasm for starting all sorts of weird pursuits like the making of corn dollies and crystallised flowers.

Lastly, if you are so dissatisfied with your house that nothing but a different one will do, you should read "I Bought a Dream" by Anne Edwards (Hurst and Blackett, 15s.). Anne Edwards, a newspaper columnist, a wife and mother, has always dreamed of owning a house in the country and this book is a light but detailed account of how she set about realising it. Her remarks about surveyors and house agents and the terms they use reminded me very much of my own experiences, and anyone buying a house will get a pretty good idea of what is involved. Miss Edwards also writes of her experiences with builders and architect when she had her house modernised, and of the time she spent at auction sales buying furniture for it. She also tells in some detail of the cost involved in realising her dream.